

Transcription: Tom Applewhite

Today is Thursday, August 18th, 2011. My name is James Crabtree, and today I'll be interviewing Dr. Applewhite. This interview is being done in person at Dr. Applewhite's residence here in northwest Austin. This interview is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board, Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. Sir, thank you for taking the time to talk to me. I really appreciate it. I know everybody listening to this interview appreciates it.

Tom Applewhite: Your welcome.

More importantly, we appreciate your service to our nation, and I know from talking last time a little bit, you were in the Navy and you were a sonar man, but I want to start with your childhood. Tell us a little bit about where you were born and where you grew up before you went in the service.

Tom Applewhite: Well, I was born outside of interior California. My dad had a 40-acre farm there. He was purchasing it like everybody was, and I had a pretty uneventful life just as a child, for the first ten years at least. I was born in '24 and we left in '34 of course, as everybody had just about because his job was eliminated with the irrigation district. He worked as a foreman out of the repair and construction gang. He was an ex-Navy man himself, but he went back in the Navy as the Riverbad Navy he said.

He would've served then in the 19-teens and I guess early 1920s?

Tom Applewhite: No, he was -

Even before that?

Tom Applewhite: Well before that.

Early 1900s?

Tom Applewhite: Yeah, he was 40 years old when I was born.

Did he tell you where he had been in the Navy?

Tom Applewhite: He said he went to Nicaragua because remember they had a big uprising?

That's right, there was an insurrection down there.

Tom Applewhite: And he said he had to be a referee.

Was he in the Navy during the Spanish American War?

Tom Applewhite: I don't believe so.

He didn't tell you about that?

Tom Applewhite: No. His recollection seemed to start with a campaign in Central South America there.

Yeah, Nicaragua. So you grew up there, in an area with a lot of citrus and agriculture.

Tom Applewhite: My dad had a little farm as I told you, and it was irrigated, and the north half of it because the gray granite ____, I mean town held north because that's where the order of law accumulated it. He had a farm there nearby, early like it was, and tried to make a go of it, and he worked there as foreman of this construction gang which was a Mexican foreman, who his family lived at the north end of our property there in this little riggy-up. We were much better off.

I'm sure in the Depression it was a hard time.

Tom Applewhite: Well, the south ____ they provided for a foreman, they provided a tent house, that was one of those Army jobs where the boards are up about this high, and screened the rest of the way, and boards, board floor.

You talked to him a lot about being in the Navy. Did that influence your decision to go in the Navy?

Tom Applewhite: Well of course, and I had told him that I would go in the Navy anyway because of the general economy, pretty sad, and so we packed our stuff and the dog in the back of an old ____ '26, '28, it was a car, and he carried all his tools so we could overhaul it on the road. He had a younger brother and an older sister, and they lived in western Texas. His brother lived in a little town of Tahoka which is about 30 miles south of Lubbock, due south, and it was really a one horse town. It had an International Harvest dealer, a mortician which his business was run from a hardware store, and he was both of those. He had a dealership for the International Harvest dealer there.

Did everything.

Tom Applewhite: Did everything, yeah, he was pretty much top dog in Tahoka, and he was a nice guy.

That was your uncle?

Tom Applewhite: That was my uncle, Ken, James Kenneth Applewhite, and he was about, I guess he was about five years younger than my father, but he was blessed as most people were then with because of their diet, with heart disease, and so we went back there when I was in the 6th grade and I went to school in Tahoka, and it was so-so compared to California's school system. But beggars can't be choosers anyway.

Were you there when the war started?

Tom Applewhite: We were in California.

Were you in high school when Pearl Harbor was bombed?

Tom Applewhite: Yes, I was entering my senior year, or in the midst of my senior year.

Did you know that day that you were going to go in the Navy?

Tom Applewhite: Oh yes, I didn't know when. So I stretched it out to the last month. I went in November of '42, because that's when I got out of high school.

I know from talking with you earlier, you said they had tested you and you did really well on your aptitude test and they made you a sonar man. Tell us a little bit about that.

Tom Applewhite: Well, sonar was kind of in its development stage. The equipment was quite modern, but the operator had to sit there and operate the thing's search engine, and I had always been pretty handy with my hands and interested in electronics and that kind of stuff, so I scored very high on their tests. So I took the sonar operator's course and did number one in the class, well because I was a musician. Never tell the Navy you're a musician.

Or they'll make you a musician, right? That was your worry.

Tom Applewhite: You'd end up with a bunch of Philippino's in the band, and it would be pass the ammunition from _____. My dad said don't tell them you know anything about music, he said you could tell them you're interested in music, like music, you don't play anything or, so I cooled it, I left my clarinet at home. I had started usually very early. My mother was a demon on music. She said well, this is, Claire is going to come out to the house. She and my brother had a great big old upright. She kept it tuned and played it herself. This gal was a piano teacher from the little town of Imperial, and we were only just like four miles out of town, about two north and two east. The piano occupied one wall of our living room, and the living room, it was complex, I call it, a board, studs and a dirt floor, or just the pavement in the living room, put some concrete down. And it was pretty funky, but decent, and so my mother said one day, she said I want you to start playing the piano, and I said what? I'm only 5 years old. She said an early start is good for you. So here comes Mrs. Craydum I guess her name was, and she was a lovely lady, middle aged like my mother, and a very talented musician. So she began teaching me scales, scales, arpeggios, all of it, and I became a fairly competent musician in short order. I think I did my first recital when I was 6. I kind of had a natural aptitude for music because I had perfect pitch.

So music and also electronics came pretty easily to you.

Tom Applewhite: Yeah, electronics, because that was the years of the electronics, everybody was interested in what was going on and everybody wanted a crystal set. We moved from Imperial and went back to be with my dad's brother for six months and we did chores. Painted the house, cleaned the yard, and that kind of work. We got room and board for that. Then my uncle Len who was my mother's sister's husband, she was Kathleen. My mother was almost 6 feet tall. I'll show you a picture of her. It's in there in the room. My dad was 6 feet tall and when she stood next to him in her bare feet, she was almost as tall. I'll show you that picture. I think it was her wedding picture. It appeared from my niece. I had an older sister, a half sister. She was ten years older. My mother had married a man named Harry Fishbog, and so my sister was his daughter, and she and I were very close. We were probably closer as half brother/sister than a lot of kids are as just brother and sister. But we rode around and went back to California then where my uncle Len, his name was Len Kayod, and he was a jolly old man, a young man, at that time he was a young man. His first child was born a year after I was. His mother failed to tell my cousin that he was an accident. You know, that's a hell of a thing to tell a kid. He was a

nice jolly boy, round face and short, and looked pretty sturdy. But I was tall and lanky like my father.

Let me ask you about when you graduated from sonar school, you said you were first in your class and they put you aboard the USS James Ward.

Tom Applewhite: Yeah, I went to two schools.

You went through the schools –

Tom Applewhite: I went through the operator school and I was paid at a third class petty officer from that. That was a real jump.

Tell us about your memories of the war, especially when you first got aboard the ship.

Tom Applewhite: Well it was living pretty tight. We were on the first destroyer escort built in the Navy, the James R. Ward. James R. Ward was a hero from Pearl Harbor. He had stayed in the turret of the battleship Oklahoma and as it slowly capsized, he led his group out with a flashlight from the turret, and he died there. He never came up. So he was one of the first to get a medal of honor.

So it was a brand new ship when you got aboard.

Tom Applewhite: Oh yeah, it was being built. See I finished my classes and then I was just doing incidental work in the sonar area there.

You came to Texas to pick it up, right?

Tom Applewhite: Yeah, all of a sudden I got orders and here I am, 18 years old, Second Class C Sonar man, with a bunch of rowdy guys, and most of them were from West Virginia, so there was a hoosk-moosk kind of language.

Where was the ship built?

Tom Applewhite: The ship was built in the Brown shipyards in Houston. It was the first one they turned out, so we took it out on a shake-down cruise.

In the Gulf of Mexico?

Tom Applewhite: Yeah, well we went in the Gulf of Mexico and then we went around Florida and headed for Norfolk.

And that was the home port for your ship?

Tom Applewhite: Actually it turned out to be a home port at the start, but then we were moved to the Navy yard in Brooklyn, the Navy yard. That's where we returned to and left from and had our repairs there.

Do you remember the first time you went out deployed into the Atlantic during the war?

Tom Applewhite: We were all in line at the rail.

Your job was to hunt U-boats, is that right?

Tom Applewhite: Yeah, this was a hunter/killer group, and there were six destroyer escorts, all built in the same shipyard I believe, and _____ they gave us as we came off the line. In fact, I think a couple of them were built in another shipyard. But anyway, what happened was there was the clinch hole domers, and that's the way they formed up there.

When you would go out and do those patrols, were there certain areas they would send you to that there had been high U-boat activity?

Tom Applewhite: Yes. We started out in the hunter/killer group overseeing the convoys, and we would be part of the convoy screen, and it's a 9-ship, 4 on each side and 1 in the middle, and unfortunately we were a junior ship, junior commanding officer, so we were way down on the end, port side. But that was all right. It was a good place to be.

Did you guys ever find any U-boats?

Tom Applewhite: Oh yeah.

Tell me about the first time you guys found a U-boat. What was that like?

Tom Applewhite: It was like gangbusters because they call you the general forward as he was there looking. You'd pick up an echo and then there were two of them, the impression programmer, which is a spiral, sometimes clockwise, sometimes counter-clockwise, and they had it all plotted out.

I know in the movies they always kind of portray it as like a dot on a screen. Is that what you were looking at was a little dot? Was it a green screen?

Tom Applewhite: Yeah, it was kind of green. It showed a submarine as about an inch long, echo. They could triangulate and figure out how far away it was.

How would you know if it was friend or foe?

Tom Applewhite: We had a code. If it was friendly, they would respond with their code.

If they didn't respond back to you with Morse code – was it Morse code that they would send back? Or did they respond back to your sonar ping?

Tom Applewhite: They would send back a message. They could send it by radio or by signal. We had signaling on that ship, and arm waving.

When you're in a submarine, I'm sure you hear the pinging then. You know you're being pinged. So they would know and they would send a message, hey, we're a friend or whatever.

Tom Applewhite: What they send you is the code of the day, and it changed every day.

So when you hit off one and you didn't get a response, then you knew it was enemy. Did you guys sink many of them?

Tom Applewhite: Well, we got one possibility where we were sent out in the north Atlantic and we went out to where this U-boat was supposed to be and we picked up a signal and made a run on it with the hedgehog.

What's a hedgehog?

Tom Applewhite: Hedgehog was a head cylinder weapon, and it sent out a circular pattern, a spiral pattern, and it had about 40 depth -

Depth charges?

Tom Applewhite: Yeah, but they were about this long -

About 2 feet?

Tom Applewhite: Yeah, 6 inches around, and they had a little engine on 'em. So peroxide, and you could set it for the depth you wanted it to go, and so we picked a place one ____, and he was up on the surface when the missile ____. He dove as we approached, and we of course picked him up right away, made a run on him and did a hedgehog weapons, this thing looked like a grand piano, huge thing on the front of the ship and it had all these spindles on it in a pattern, and that pattern was much like the others, you know, it was spiral.

And so you would deploy the depth charges then off of that.

Tom Applewhite: Yeah, we fired the depth charge and used a stopwatch when you fire it, and you know how fast it sinks, and ka-boom. There was one explosion, and you hear the contact fuses. They're not set for depth, they are set for contact.

So it hit something.

Tom Applewhite: It hit the submarine because the next day we were busy picking up oil samples and garbage samples.

OK, so a lot of that came up, so it led you to believe that you were able to sink it.

Tom Applewhite: Right. They always give you a maybe because the Germans were pretty smart. If they got hit and they managed to isolate the compartment, they would throw a lot of stuff out. But we were pretty sure we got that one because we went back and forth over the spot and there was an echo on the bottom.

So that seems pretty convincing then.

Tom Applewhite: It's pretty good, but it's the way it goes, and so we started on a convoy duty as I said, 2 and the 4. With EE group. This was right after when I went in the service, before air raids and went to home port. We went north to Norfolk and we would just go in to town. We

turned around at the sea buoy and started out. Had the convoys all lined up, and it was 105 ships.

That's a big convoy, yeah.

Tom Applewhite: Man, we were pouring money down a rat hole, Sam.

Did you ever have any ships get torpedoed during a time when you were doing an escort duty?

Tom Applewhite: It was always our fear one would get inside the screen, and one did and sunk, we were. you know, like a Chinese fire drill when he sunk a ship in there, but we were there when he came around her, and we were running a 9-knot convoy, so a big submarine can make it between us easy. He was on battery and the Germans were pretty smart, so he got through the screen and turned around and followed it, picking 'em off the back. So we ran across, ran 'em down, chased 'em, but we never got any. He was pretty clever. The Germans had very sophisticated electronics and very sophisticated people. They were real engineers.

They had pretty good crews on the U-boats from what I've read. They were officers and their enlisted were pretty sharp.

Tom Applewhite: Very sharp, and they were the elite of the Navy.

Do you remember when they had one of their U-boats captured? Do you remember that incident? Did that give any extra intelligence or help to you, the sonar man, because I believe they recovered some of the log books, didn't they, some of the code books and things?

Tom Applewhite: Yeah, that was a good thing when they captured it.

We've got some on display in Chicago now, right, it's in a museum there in a tour.

Tom Applewhite: Yeah, we toured it. I guess he had, was on his engines.

He was on the surface. Or he surfaced anyway.

Tom Applewhite: Yeah, surfaced. He would dive, go down and flood the boat and sink. The prescribed method is don't be captured, so -

Yeah, scuttle the ship.

Tom Applewhite: Scuttle it, but this guy made a mistake thinking he was gonna come to the surface and outflag them, and then he came to the surface and blasted the hell out of 'em with the surface weapons.

I read, too, that those U-boats, the log books were all lead-lined so if they were to surface where they could throw those books over and they would sink to the bottom.

Tom Applewhite: Yeah, they were pretty smart cookies, those Germans were a damn fine Mensch ____, you know.

When did you get to tour the U-boat? Was it in the 50s, or do you remember when you first went

through that one that was on display? What was that like getting to tour a U-boat that you may very well have hunted?

Tom Applewhite: A good feeling, and particularly since we had participated in several sinkings of one of their screened for the USS ____, after our group warmed up, until we had six ships serviceable and ready for service, we ran convoys back and forth. The first was right after our shake-down crew, we went to _____. It was a rag tag operation. We had two seagoing Coast Guard cutters, with a senior in this convoy, three line shapers, US, and the rest of the screen was made up of old horse pack destroyers from WWI. Our range was 21 days at cruising speed, 15 knots.

Without refueling?

Tom Applewhite: Yeah. They were very, ship's fuel, steam ships, so we would move right along, go across one filling, I mean we'd fill it up and went across without refueling and then we would refuel there and get back. The convoys ran the same speed both directions which was not to our liking because we were, and the poor old sailors on those convoy ships really pitched and rolled on the way back.

That's what I've heard about that.

Tom Applewhite: Oh yeah, they were in ballast and they were ballast in the towns to be at the water line like they were when they were full.

Tell us a little bit about a typical shift on one of your patrols. Would you be at the sonar 8 hours at a time? Or 12?

Tom Applewhite: No, I was lead petty officer, so I was the operator at general quarters, and at the time I was assigned to the electronics division. In other words, when I was Second Class, I was working in the radar, steering, everything. I had to learn to do all those things as well as maintaining the sonar.

So the guys that were beneath you in rank, that were sonar men, how many would be manning a sonar at one time when it's not two -

Tom Applewhite: Two.

How long would their shifts normally be?

Tom Applewhite: They were 4 on and 4 off.

4 on and 4 off, just continuously.

Tom Applewhite: And I generally didn't stand watch. I slept on the flying bridge. We had an officer's quarters, a bunk, and it was usually occupied by the officer of the deck if they wanted, but they would prefer to be down in their quarters, so they worked out that I would use it for night time, because I could get called immediately, if it was a flying bridge drill. They would just open the hatch and everybody would drag me out actually. I got plenty of calls out, but it was interesting. I believe we went to Casablanca, toured the Prince's harem. We went to Gibraltar and we went to North Africa and various places.

How was the food on board the ships? Pretty decent?

Tom Applewhite: Yeah, it was acceptable. We had big freezers and we kept frozen meats and we ate lots of when we could get them, we ate lots of vegetables. The rest of the time we ate canned stuff.

How about mail? Did mail come pretty consistently?

Tom Applewhite: No. They OK'd it whenever they got it.

Whenever they could catch up to you type of thing?

Tom Applewhite: Yeah, usually we got mail, once maybe in the middle of our three weeks. See we ran a three-week pattern. We would go out for three weeks, deliver the ship, fiddle around, do maintenance, turn around and pick up a return convoy.

Back to Norfolk, or back to Brooklyn.

Tom Applewhite: Yeah, we usually unloaded those at Norfolk. Most of the convoys formed up and left from Norfolk, and we had huge operations there.

Yeah, they still do. Did you ever escort any ships out of Newport up in Rhode Island?

Tom Applewhite: Oh yeah, we picked her up early wherever we could, wherever we should. Our pattern was just we went, we went over and then turned around after refuel and repairs, etc., and came back to Norfolk, and there we went in, delivered the ships, and if anybody had to be taken off for medical reasons, we would get rid of them there. But generally we dropped the convoy at the sea buoy and take off for New York, but our home port then was Brooklyn Navy Yard.

Where were you on VE Day? Do you remember Victory in Europe Day where you were?

Tom Applewhite: Yeah, VE Day I was 700 miles off the coast of North America running a pattern. We had a ship every couple of miles in a line about, offshore about 700 miles, and we were going back for our designated sector, and to present suicide. They feared that some of these guys would try to sneak through and be heroes, you know, so they had a fairly deep pattern and a close pattern.

Did you learn about it over the radio? Did your captain come on the ship's radio and announce it?

Tom Applewhite: It passes around, the orders, they had orders of the day and the lead petty officer would pass it out to the troops.

So everybody was pretty elated at that point.

Tom Applewhite: Oh yeah, those of us who were the happiest were those who were at port. But my wife, it's gone with her, all our buddies. She was in high school and she had to go and see that VE Day, what went on.

Where was your wife at that time?

Tom Applewhite: She was at home.

Was she in Brooklyn?

Tom Applewhite: No, she lived in Colindale, which is the end of the IRTE line that runs north from the heart of the city and goes out onto -

Palm Bay New York?

Tom Applewhite: To Palm Bay New York, yeah.

Up in kind of Dutchess County area?

Tom Applewhite: Oh yes, it's right, she lived in a house, one stop from the end of that Ellerby line, and Ellerby is a big resort area, and we used to go across just on a car. We had a car and we'd take the whole family and go over to City Island, and was right there, straight shot across.

Did she go down to Times Square that day?

Tom Applewhite: Oh yeah.

That was a famous place to celebrate.

Tom Applewhite: They all had to go to Times Square.

That's great. After the war had ended in Europe, were you going to be sent to the Pacific?

Tom Applewhite: Yeah, we were put in through, we put into the Navy Yard in New York. They took off all the – see, we had hedgehog and we had 8, a patter of 4 and closer in.

They took those off?

Tom Applewhite: Yeah, they took everything off except the rear tracks of them. They took the torpedo tubes off because we had torpedo tubes up on the line with it, and because a torpedo is pretty effective against a submarine.

So were you there then, was your ship in the Navy Yard when the war ended in Japan?

Tom Applewhite: No, we were en route. What happened was we ran, or the Division went together, all together, to Boston, and that's when I convinced her to marry me, and so we had a wedding there in a little church.

In New York?

Tom Applewhite: Yeah, and on Palm Bay, and we went, she had a week off, so I had time off, too, and we went to New York City, stayed at a first class hotel.

That's great. What hotel did you stay in, do you remember?

Tom Applewhite: Yeah, I should remember. Well, I'll come up with it.

I know there's a lot of fancy hotels in New York.

Tom Applewhite: It was on 5th Avenue, so that was hotel row more or less, and my father-in-law drove a limousine at the time. He was on a retainer with a guy he worked for. The guy he worked for had plenty of money, and he owned a repair service called Valous, Valous ship rice, sort of everything like that, you know, repair and maintenance, and so he was a good mechanic. My father-in-law was very talented, tool die man, learned it from his parents, from his father, like in the good old days.

When the war ended, did you stay in the Navy very long or did you have enough points to get out?

Tom Applewhite: I had enough points to get out very early of course, but to get out was always at the discretion of the commanding officer, and so I was the last chief to leave that ship I think.

So you were on the Ward the entire time.

Tom Applewhite: Yeah, the final watch, I stood watch with an engineering officer, and so I was running the ship, in essence, because we were partners in running a ship. He could give all the orders he wanted so I always figured out where we were going, and we had to go to Jacksonville ____.

Naval port, Naval station.

Tom Applewhite: Yeah, where they had all those, called it Green, Green something River, they had all these oddball ships and we had to be mothballed and then sent up there, and I got off the ship when it hit Jacksonville. They gave me a private ride in to the dock, we just slowed down and I got, jumped on the thing ____, and they took me over to the naval station at Jacksonville. So I stayed there about three or four days.

So that was it for the Ward then. You were the main crew and you were there at the end, too. It was mothballed and I guess scrapped at some point.

Tom Applewhite: Yeah, probably. They had a whole river full of them.

I'm sure.

Tom Applewhite: Melted down probably. They probably recovered all the working parts, big reciprocating diesels, they had 10-cylinder pistons about that big around, and they had the lower crankshafts and they were firing that-a-way. A very efficient engine. We could do just about 28 knots before the war.

When you got out of the Navy, did you know at that time you wanted to go to college?

Tom Applewhite: Yeah. I didn't know, but so did everybody else.

Were you able to use the GI Bill?

Tom Applewhite: Yeah, so I went, except they couldn't really get in, I went out to Columbia. They'd just laugh at you.

So you got in Columbia?

Tom Applewhite: No, they would just laugh at you. Three-year backup. And so I said to my wife I'll think for a while and decide what I want to do. So the first day I went to middle review, under the GI Bill, went to radio school, and I learned how to do all of the maintenance stuff, it wasn't a deal that I wanted to pursue because there were too many, too much competition right after the war. So I worked at Dunn & Bradstreet. My wife worked out on the west side of Manhattan, down in the business district. I was kind of off down that way, too, because we would go together. I would get off wherever I got off, 32nd Street maybe, something like that, where Dunn & Bradstreet had their big offices, and they operated a ____ route. Those were the days. Paid a buck ten an hour, whatever I got. The going rate then was about that I guess. And I talked to several people about opportunities. I had a little old guy was really enthusiastic about me, and he would provide the money and we were to go into the ship repair business. I said I don't think so. There was a million sonar men out there when I got through with that.

Where did you end up ultimately going to college?

Tom Applewhite: Cal Tech. That was kind of a long story, too. I went to work right away, working with my father. That's the reason he went to California. We went to California because he wrote me a letter and said he had passed the gasfitter's state exam, and so he had a license to do gas fitting, all that stuff.

California was booming right after the war.

Tom Applewhite: Oh yeah. We made pretty good money out of that, and he was, he was around '63 when we started that, or no, he was younger than that. Yeah, he must've been 63 because he was 61 when the war started.

Where were you living in California at that point?

Tom Applewhite: In El Monte. When we first got there, we were living in the downstairs in _____. He had a two-bedroom and bath and kitchen or just kind of a floor next to the garage, attached to the garage on top of this two-story house they built, and his upper floor was three-bedroom, two bath, kitchen, tiny area and a porch, kind of a sun porch on it.

Getting into Cal Tech was quite an accomplishment, right, to be accepted there?

Tom Applewhite: Yeah, I said to myself, I would have to have a review of everything to try to get into that school. So that was my target, was Cal Tech. Well, I had Occidental Law, some of those schools that were highly rated. I interviewed at UCLA.

After you graduated from Cal Tech, you got your doctorate at some point.

Tom Applewhite: Yeah, stayed there. Here's the way it worked. I went to Pasadena City College for three years to catch up with everything and be prepared to transfer to Cal Tech. I wanted to transfer as a junior because that's the way they worked it. It was a two-year mainly, so I worked my butt off and graduated as top person in my class at Pasadena City College. I talked to my advisor and said I really would like to go to Cal Tech. He says yeah, you can get in there. Just study up on all the stuff you do. I had done very well at Pasadena City College.

You made number one, I guess so.

Tom Applewhite: That was usually my goal.

You had done the same in your sonar school as well, right? You finished first as a sonar man.

Tom Applewhite: All courses, and anything I got into, I tried to be in the top 5 percent. I tell people that I took two years of college physics from an old man named Forester, and Forester had a reputation that nobody ever got an A from his class. And I said you old son of a bitch, I got an A.

Really, wow. So you really felt like you had earned it obviously.

Tom Applewhite: Worked my butt off.

What did you do after you got your doctorate? Did you teach?

Tom Applewhite: No, I went directly to Dow Chemical and Dow had a western region laboratory and office and stuff in Pittsburg, California.

Where is Pittsburg, California?

Tom Applewhite: It's due east of San Francisco.

OK, kind of the Contra Costa area?

Tom Applewhite: Contra Costa County, and we bought a small, well first we rented a house when we first got there, and then we found a little house, they were building a real small subdivision in an old walnut orchard on the end and a turnaround, cul-de-sac, and we bought that house for \$23,400, and we sold it for \$10,000 more than that, and we bought another house about the same price we sold ours for, and we bought a nice auto dealer house who were being transferred down to Stockton to take over a dealership, so he had a classy house. It was 4-bedroom and 2 baths, big swimming pool in the backyard, the whole ball of wax. Next door neighbor was a musician.

How long were you with Dow? Did you work your whole career with Dow?

Tom Applewhite: 2 years. This particular arm of Dow used PhD's as lab assistants and so of course I asked people, looking for opportunities at other places, and so right about then, that was when the USDA was really booming and expanding, and they were expanding into the vegetable oil business, chemistry of castor oil and industrial oils, and it was right while I worked at _____. I was the lead pay, I was the first man hired for this small group. It ended up being 10 or 15

people, men and women together, and I worked my tail off and stayed at eye level and got promoted fast, and I got as high as -

I was going to ask you, too, your doctorate was in chemistry?

Tom Applewhite: Yeah.

So you were considered a chemist or chemical engineer?

Tom Applewhite: Organic chemist.

How did you end up in Texas?

Tom Applewhite: Well, long story. Where did they take us first when we were commissioned, because our ship was in Houston, see. I horsed around and got acquainted with Houston.

Yeah, I knew you lived in West Texas a little bit as a child.

Tom Applewhite: Oh yeah. Eastern Texas is more interesting, and from there, our ship was built there, so we went to New Orleans, and then we'd go back to New Orleans on occasion.

What was it that brought you into Austin? Did you end up working here for a corporation?

Tom Applewhite: Let's see, my daughter and her husband had worked, he had a degree in prison administration, and so he had to move to Austin because that's where the headquarters were at, and he was one of the six people who ran that.

So your daughter and son-in-law were here in Austin.

Tom Applewhite: They're still here in the same general place, but it was kind of funny, when Pam had graduated with good marks and good reputation, and she went to work for John Sealy Hospital in Galveston. She was a head surgery nurse in the brain department. She said it was just like MASH. Crazy as hell. And so she got a real introduction to the Navy there, and then when she and her husband were married, she moved out to Huntsville, where they stayed for 10 years.

It all makes sense if she worked in a prison.

Tom Applewhite: That's where he went to school.

Yeah, Sam Houston State.

Tom Applewhite: Yeah, and so we went there to visit them. We'd go there. We'd fly or take a plane. We never drove except when we wanted to take a load of stuff, we'd drive.

Sir, I really appreciate you taking time to let me interview you like this and we have archives at the Land Office that go back hundreds of years. We have Davy Crockett's widow's original land grant, we have the Registro that Stephen F. Austin kept in his own hand of all the original settlers, and this interview is going to be added to the archive so that potentially hundreds of years from now people can listen to this and learn something from it.

Tom Applewhite: I can provide you with, I have all the paperwork.

Yeah, I'd love to get copies of that.

Tom Applewhite: Charts.

Or even photographs or things of that sort would be great. But what I wanted to ask you sir, with posterity in mind, is there anything you'd want to say to anybody listening to this interview potentially a hundred years from now about your service in the Navy or anything along those lines.

Tom Applewhite: It was an opportunity on the road to the very ____ of life. It was one of the stepping stones because I went from a regular worker with my dad. He died. I sold, and in the meantime Harry and his father and mother had come out there and settled down because they had lived there before earlier, and they bought a house just about six to eight blocks from us, in Prospect Heights.

In addition to being a stepping stone, you also helped defeat the Nazis which I think everyone is very grateful for as well.

Tom Applewhite: Oh yeah. We did nothing in the Japanese War really.

Well you did a lot with what your job was helping defeat the U-boats and everything, and I want to thank you and from Commissioner Patterson and everybody at the Land Office, we want to thank you for your service to our nation. This program is just one small way of saying thanks.

Tom Applewhite: I appreciate it.

In about a couple of weeks we're going to send you copies of this interview on CDs that you can keep some or give them to your family or friends, and we'll also have a nice letter and certificate from Commissioner Patterson in a binder. I really appreciate your time and it's been an honor talking to you today. Thank you.

[End of recording]